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SUBJECT: JERUSALEM MEDIA REACTION (6/17): THE WAY FORWARD -  
NATIONAL UNITY AND ELUSIVE PEACE

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Main Stories:  
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Al-Quds opens with reports on the Egyptian brokered Israel/Gaza truce talks under the headline, " Hamas will inform Cairo of its final decision [Jne 17]." The paper quotes Hamas leader Ismael Hniyyah stating, "The draft of the truce agreement s in its final stage." Al-Quds also quotes Israli Defense Minister Barak explaining, "should we each a truce agreement with Gaza, we will have t make painful decisions regarding Palestinian prisner issues." The same story concludes with a qute by Palestinian presidential spokesperson Abu udaynah highlighting that President Abbas insiststhat the "siege" on the Gaza Strip should be lifte "immediately" after the signing of a truce agreement. Al-Hayat Al-Jadida leads with, "PresidentAbbas is hoping to reach a truce [with Israelis]in the coming days and he has stressed the need to open [Gaza] border crossings." On the ground, th three dailies report that four Palestinian "figters" were killed and sevr al others injured in an Israeli military strikeon the southern Gaza Strip in Khan Younis.

Th dailies report on trilateral discussions held by ecretary Rice with Israeli Defense Minister Bara and Palestinian Prime Minister Fayyad on June 16in Jerusalem. Al-Quds reports that, "Fayyad reitratated Palestinian opposition to continued settlemet activities in Jerusalem." Related reports inthe dailies highlight Israeli Premier Olmert's sggestion to postpone discussion on the status of erusalem. The stories note that he informed Rice bout his intention to continue Jerusalem settlemnt activities. Palestinian presidency spokesperon Nabil Abu Rudaynah responded to Olmert's statment, commenting that there can be, "no solution [t the conflict] unless occupied Arab Jerusalem beomes the capital of the

independent Palestinian state." Al-Ayyam reports Secretary Rice stating that she, "did not sense any change in the Israeli position toward settlements." Al-Hayat Al-Jadida summarizes that Rice, "ended her visit without being able to remove checkpoints." The same story adds that, "Israel is resisting American pressure to reach a [peace] agreement."

The meeting between Palestinian President Abbas and Arab League Secretary General Amr Musa in Amman on June 16 is front page news. According to coverage, the two leaders discussed a possible Palestinian-Israeli truce, negotiations with Israel and internal Palestinian dialogue. The dailies report that Abbas also gave a read-out of his meetings with Secretary Rice.

The papers headline internal Palestinian, "reconciliation talks." Al-Quds notes that national Palestinian dialogue will begin in Egypt at the end of the month. Reports also note that Fatah delegations will meet with Fatah members in Gaza in preparation of talks with other Palestinian parties.

Al-Quds reports that the State Department confirmed that President Bush confirmed the necessity of establishing a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza. The paper writes that President Bush's comments were sent to Al Quds in response to its on-line report about presidential hopeful John McCain's comments about an "alternative home" for Palestinians.

The three dailies run coverage of the visit by members of an ECA citizen exchange program administered by the, American Council of Young Political Leaders (ACYPL) to Palestinian areas. Al-Quds quotes the Governor of Bethlehem telling the delegation, that includes U.S. state legislators, that the Palestinian people, "yearn for peace" with Israel and that Palestinians, "have sacrificed a great deal for the cause of peace." The articles quote an ACYPL delegation member explaining that the visit is part of ongoing

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efforts to increase exchanges between Palestinian and American youth leaders. Separate reports also cover the delegation's meeting with the Governor of Salfit in the West Bank. The Governor is quoted speaking about the, "suffering of Palestinians" in his governorate as a result of the separation barrier and ongoing settlement activities.

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BLOCK QUOTES:  
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¶1. Independent Al-Quds runs its daily editorial under the title, "What surprise are we waiting for?" (17/7): "The current Palestinian situation faces two immediate and important challenges; the first challenge is related to the brave initiative that was launched by President Abu Mazin to resume national talks after a long year of division, weakness and suffering. The second challenge is related to efforts sponsored by Egypt to reach a truce between Hamas and Israel. These efforts have reached a critical stage with both sides having stated their conditions and having found a compromise position. A truce is expected to be reached shortly ... the issue of national talks is the main challenge that faces the two parties of the nation. Talks should not be for the purpose of sloganeering... but should unify political positions and lead to real action..."

¶2. Independent official daily Al-Hayat Al-Jadida carries an op-ed by columnist Omar Al-Ghoul entitled, "What is the meaning of Rice's comments?" (6/17): "At the end of her visit to the region, Dr. Rice made a very vague, negative statement about Israeli settlement policy, which is destroying any horizon for political agreement, contrary to international laws and norms, and against all agreements that were signed by the two sides from Oslo to Annapolis in 2007. Secretary Rice said that settlements 'might' affect the peace process. Such a comment does not reflect an American desire to pressure the occupation and aggression state of Israel. On the contrary, it gives Israel motivation and justification to continue its policies to judanize and confiscate Palestinian lands. The direct proof for this is found in the Israeli Prime Minister's assurance that settlement activities will continue and not affect negotiations. It is as if he is saying [to Rice], 'we don't think that your comment has any relevance to us ...'"

WALLES